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ABSTRACT

A proposed career education program for learning disabled adolescents in the Bellmore-Merrick Central High School District (New York) is described. The program is to include the following curriculum areas: motivation for work, school and the working world, self awareness, occupational knowledge, choosing a field, job selection, securing a job, job expectations, life skills, and college. Other components will include work experience and job placement, research and communication (both inhouse and external dissemination), and parent involvement. (DB)

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CAREER EDUCATION FOR THE LEARNING DISABLED

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After three years experience identifying and providing diagnostic, prescriptive teaching programs and compensatory education for learning disabled children, the Bellmore-Merrick Central High School District recoginzed a further need of these children. The Director of Special Education of the District, proposed a program, "Career Education in Learning Disabilities Resource Rooms", from funding under Title VIB ESEA. The impetus for this proposal came from a group of parents who were instrumental in helping the District identify the need for its current system of support services. This same group, now operating in three committees, continues to be vocal and productive in developing future goals.

"Career education is the totality of experience through which one learns about and prepares to engage in work as a part of his/her own way of life." (1) "There are many aspects to consider, all interdependent-acquisition of occupational skills needed by the individual,...the development of attitudes, knowledge, interests and a positive self-concept". (2) The program, following this definition, concentrates on a Career Education Curriculum to be used by Learning Disabilities Resource Room teachers, on staff development, on extensive community and parent involvement, such as parent support groups and evening seminars, as well as on direct services to the LD student population, in terms of IEP development, career counselling, post high school counselling, job experience and placement. The entire program is intimately connected with the three parent/faculty committees: Parent Awareness, Community Resources and Curriculum Committees.

WHY A SPECIAL PROGRAM?

Students who are able to function in a mainstream class for any given subject, are so placed. There the emphasis in their daily program is primarily academic. Many of the learning disabled students are from a socio-economic background where there is little experience with non-professional or non-management occcupations. In addition, the suburban environment precludes exposure to many careers. Learning disabled students often lack cognizance and awareness of the resources of their environment. Children with other handicapping conditions have had many more options in terms of career education, such as vocational orientation and work experience; learning disabled students in the academic mainstream are often not eligible for these programs. The results of these factors working together is that parents and students lack realistic career goals. This fact emphasizes the need for a formal District wide Career Education program.

Learning disability teachers are trained to recognize the particular strengths and weaknesses in their Resource Room students. The disability these students have "must be considered an inability to learn at the normal rate, or in the conventional manner". (3) The Resource Room teacher rethinks and reworks conventional education approaches to

find the right mode of learning appropriate for each individual student. "Their greatest handicap seems to be their inability to generalize from experience". (4) In addition to academic help, the Resource Room teacher is in the ideal position to use Career Education as an additional learning vehicle because it stresses planning, organization, task orientation, goal direction, self-concept and locus of control. However, due to lack of training in this area, the teachers lack specific skills in this area. These factors are considered in our program development.

Our very productive group of parents further formulated and developed the need for Career Education. A questionnaire was sent from the Parent Awareness Committee to all parents of LD students in the District, in August 1979. The responses informed us of a great desire for more in-depth information regarding legal rights of the Learning Disabled child, post high school options in education, career education, planning and counselling. In actuality, the parent is the one who is finally responsible for his/her child. It is the parent who lives with the denials, frustrations and confusion. The parents' knowledge and acceptance of the child's behavior has a marked effect upon that behavior and development. The parents want to know how to help their individual children.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Career Education Curriculum

The basic curriculum developed for the learning disabled student was completed during the summer of 1979, by a committee of counselors, Resource Room teachers and parents. It refers to the career of living, not earning a living.

In this curriculum, Career Education is interpreted to include acquistion not only of attitudes, knowledge and interest, but also of a positive self-concept to further facilitate decision making, occupational choice and life adjustment.

The basic curriculum areas are:

- Motivation for Work
- School and the Working World
- Self-Awareness
- General Occupational Knowledge
- Choosing a Field
- Job Selection
- Securing a Job
- Job Expectations
- Life Skills
- For the College Bound

The curriculum will include objectives and outline of knowledge for each area. This basic framework will encompass employment, practically oriented academics, work with family relationships, social and community activities and personal and social behavior development. A packet of activities is now in the printing stage. These materials were carefully chosen and/or developed to be suitable to our Resource Room population.

Funding requirements included the development of an evaluation tool. A counsultant in test administration conducted a full day workshop for the staff and parent advisory council members in June 1979, to decide on test content and format. Two test forms were needed to guage a student's career knowledge before and after exposure to the curriculum. The Project Counselor, with recommendations and suggestions from the committee, designed two paper and pencil tests. The reading level of non-technical terms in the tests has been assessed at 6.0-7.0. Administration to non-readers is to be via taped versions of the tests. The validity was assessed by a specialist in Career Education. Currently, a pilot program coordinated by the Project Counselor, is in operation to test the reliability and equivalency of the two forms on a sample group from the Junior and Senior High School LD Resource Room population.

The tests are to be used not only for external evaluation, but also for the development of a testing profile to key each student's need to the appropriate area in the Career Education curriculum. The Resource Room teacher can use the profile to assess areas of strengths and weaknesses when planning the student's IEP.

Beginning September 1980, each LD Resoruce Room student will take the pre-test and be profiled. Appropriate Career Education goals will be infused into the student's Individual Education Plan. Some examples are:

ability to work independently
ability to accept constructive criticism
ability to ask appropriate questions if assignment is not clear
ability to shift from one activity to another

Career Education materials will be used to develop career knowledge and future plans for the student, as well as to reinforce academic skills. The overall plan is to pre-test, profile, infuse into the student's curriculum, then post-test to evaluate progress.

Work Experience and Job Placement

The Community Resources Committee, composed of parents of LD students, two guidance counselors, the Career Education Project Coordinator and two administrators, including the Director of Special Education, is developing another aspect of Career Education--Work Experience and Job Placement. The goal of this committee which began work in the summer of 1979, is to set up an On-The-Job Training Network of local industries. Sutdents will work cooperatively under the supervision of a job developer/counselor/teacher, in a demand industry while they are attending school, and then go on to full time placement after completing school.

This committee is currently seeking additional funding to hire a staff to accomplish this goal by October, 1980. The job developer is a key to this program. He/she will seek out cooperative employers and restructure positions so that a student's particular handicapping condition is not a barrier to job success. A major problem is transportation. It is very difficult to get a high school student to and from a work experience situation considering the poor state of mass transportation in Nassau County.

To quote from a representative of the Labor Department, Mr. Sydney Schwartz, "When referring to a handicapped person, I like to think of him as a person with certain abilities that also happens to have a handcap". Not only will the students benefit but so will industry with better trained personnel eventually abailable.

Research and Communication

An essential aspect is to disseminate knowledge and experience. Why should we all invent and then reinvent the wheel? In-house communication, as well as external dissemination is planned into the program.

Counselors and Resource Room staffs in the seven secondary schools in the District are informed of progress at periodic staff development meetings, coordinated by the Project Counselor through the Director of Pupil Personnel Services. In addition, memos are frequently sent from the Counselor and Coordinator of the Project, advising the Districts's staff of important upcoming events, seminars, new college programs, etc.

The Title VIB Counselor conducted extensive research for a year into college/community support service for the LD student. The result is a 150 page handbook in looseleaf format to allow for periodic editing. Included is information on special test arrangements for college admissions examinations, financial aid for college, specific college programs, supportive services available and job placement information. All counselors and high school Resource Rooms have a copy of this manual. Portions have been used as a basis for a parent seminar in choosing a college for the learning disabled as well as for individual counseling.

We also take seriously our commitment to disseminate our progress to other professionals in the field. The Project Coordinator writes and mails a Career Newsletter to approximately 400 persons including administrators in 56 Long Island School Districts, all parents of LD students in our District, Members of the Board of Education of the Bellmore-Merrick Central High School District and other interested parties. This led to a meeting with another school district, Baldwin's School District personnel.

The Project Director and a Resource Room teacher presented a Program Overview at a two day ACLD, 17th Annual International Conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and plan another presentation in a conference in Pennsylvania later in the Spring.

The Parent Support Group, which will be described in the next section, now meets bi-monthly. This allows for an exchange of information and ideas between the District staff and the parents and is essential to the vitality and responsivity of the program.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT-THE KEY

The Parent Awareness Committee was the first of the three committees to blossom. They devised and distributed a survey to over 200 parents of LD students to ascertain the most important issues on career development. The survey showed a high interest in legal rights, psychological coping, existing support programs, "on-the-job" training programs and further information on post high school training programs. Based on these findings, a series of four monthly seminars was scheduled.

Professionals from local universities, the Nassau County BOCES and the District's Special Education Department addressed these issues. Parent participation was encouraged through informal question and answer periods. Speakers included an Assistant Professor of the Physically Disabled/Learning Disabled from Hofstra University. The theme for this presentation was "Legal Rights of the Learning Disabled Person". The Director of Special Education Services of Herricks School District, developed the theme of "Psychological Coping". Our District Director of Special Education, together with a guidance counselor for the District and the Project Counselor, encouraged parents to participate in a panel discussion on effective communication between counselor/teacher/student and parent, on existing training programs and on current college availability. A fourth seminar to occur in March 1980, will focus on options in BOCES and alternative careers for women.

The total thrust of these evening seminars is to assist parents in guiding their children's further career development and/or career selection. The program has met with exceptional success. Not only have the parents responded to the evaluation form given at each seminar, with comments such as "very helpful", but in addition, the parents have requested specific future programs.

The desire for the Parent Support Group currently in operation emanated from and eventually absorbed the Parent Awareness Committee. The group meets bi-monthly for two hours in the evening. Currently, there are 16 members. It is facilitated by a Resource Room teacher, formerly co-chairperson of the Awareness Committee and by the Project Counselor. The group functioning is designed to follow principles of social work to allow for non-judgemental exchange of feelings and ideas of the group members concerning their role as parents and the education and career plans of their LD children.

The group is open ended and will accept for membership any parent whose child is in a Resource Room. It is a deliberate choice to include <u>all</u> age levels in one group to allow those new to the system to gain from those that have more experience. The parents are the experts on their children. They have lived with the frustration and will continue to do so. The Resource Room teacher lends expert advisement only when called for. The Counselor guides the group process. An original goal of the program is to have the parents feel confident enough to set up a satellite program of peer-facilitated groups to begin operation in the fall to expand the service to other evenings to increase involvement by other parents.

The desire for new programs has emanated from these Support Group meetings. Seminars have been set up to learn about college choices, psychological issues and opportunities from other local agencies such as the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, CETA, Non-Traditional Jobs for Women, etc. Emotional issues are revealed and discussed. "Sympathetic understanding of the parent is the first step towards helping parents to modify attitudes that can only aggravate the disorder by heaping an emotional overlay upon an already troublesome problem". (5) The non-judgemental atmosphere

allows the parents to help each other. Isolation dissolves when a parent hears that other people have problems similar to their own. The group functions both on educational and on emotional supportive levels. The resounding impact demonstrates the need for more dialogue between educators and parents.

CONCLUSION

The desire to learn more about the legal rights of an LD child, the need to have realistic expectations for the future, the search for community and industry programs and the very real concern for future economic independence of their children, prompted parents to seek and develop services specifically designed to help their children with learning disabilities. Proposed, developed and now in operation in Bellmore-Merrick Central High School District is a program entitiled Career Education in Learning Disabilities Resource Rooms. The program includes a basic Career Education Curriculum, student counseling, parent groups and seminars, in-service training, in-house and external communication and proposed on-the-job training and placement.

The target group includes administrators, guidance staff, Resource Room personnel, parents and community as well as direct service to the LD student population. We are doing our part to fulfill the major goal of the Bureau of Education that "by 1980 every handicapped child who leaves school will have had career education training." We have begun in the Resource Room and worked to expand involvement to the community at large.

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Mrs. Susan Groh Rosenberg, Title VIB Counselor, Project Counselor, Curriculum Committee, Development of LD Handbook, Parent Support Group, Evaluation

Mrs. Gloria Wilson, Resource Room Teacher, Chairperson Parent Awareness Committee, Parent Support Group

Ms. Ann Crowley, High School Guidance Counselor, Chairperson Community Resources Committee

Mrs. Rachel Shapiro, Resource Room Teacher, Curriculum Committee

Mrs. Catherine Calla, Secretary

FOOTNOTES

(1). U. S. Office of Education, Nov. 1974.

(2). Pamela Gillett, Career Education for Children with Learning Disabilities, Academic Therapy Publications, San Rafael, California, 1978, pg. 13.

(3). Elise Byfeild Gilden, "Should Parents Redefine Learning Disability", from the Journal of Learning Disabilities, Dec. 1978, Educational Press Assoc., Chicago, Ill., pgs. 605-606.

(4). Doreen Kronick, Learning Disabilities: Its Implications to a Responsible Society: Academic Therapy Publications, San Rafael, California, 1974

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